

Trip to the Farm

by Lee Fowler (2013)

Another tour, another trip report. I've made it known a number of times that I start writing my trip reports well in advance of the actual event. I can get three or four pages written about an upcoming event and get pretty close to what actually transpires. My goal is to write an entire trip report and see if it matches how the event actually unfolds. For most of the weekend events the only unknown is how many trophies Jim Cambron will bring home. So, as I'm writing a report for the April 11th tour starting at "way down south Walmart," let's pause here for a factoid. "Jim, that Walmart is almost within walking distance of our house so it's a great starting point for a tour. Pretty close to the Treveys and a few others also."

Then it hit me! We're not going on that tour! No trip report! I think I must be having withdrawal problems. With no plans to go to SpringThing either, I have no reason to write a trip report. I must be having severe psychological issues to start writing a report on a trip we're not going on. It must be due to the fact that I just sold my 2001 Ford Ranger. I'm seriously distressed about that. It was my baby. I had a bed liner in it but never hauled anything in the back. I didn't want to scratch the bed liner. Add one more splinter in the windmill of my mind.

Since I've started this report I might as well go ahead and write about our long weekend of no Porsche events. The rest is just about us so if you're not interested you can quit reading here.

We left Huntsville early Thursday morning with the intent of getting ahead of the approaching thunderstorms. Our destination is Sparta, Georgia, and Three Centuries Farm. Just so happens that's where our son Brad, daughter-in-law Megan, and granddaughter Emolyn reside. We're taking the Jetta. Several reasons for this. One is that it's a Diesel and gets great mileage. Two, the Ford F-150 (Ranger replacement) has very little interior luggage space. And three, there's no garage parking and there's plenty of cats to jump on cars so the Carrera is not an option.

Speaking of the F-150, we got it from Suzanne's parents' estate. It's a 2006 with only 20k miles. So, the 2001 Ranger had to go. The only problem with the F-150 is its size. I'm having problems getting it in the middle of a parking space. And backing up is another problem all together. I decided that I needed a backup

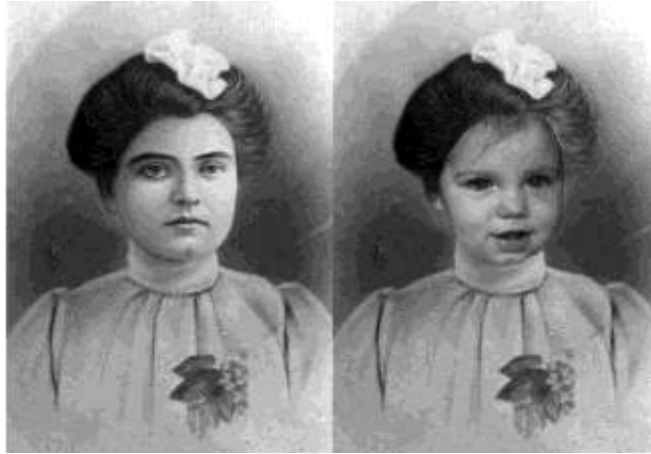
camera. Typical of my thought processes, the backup camera evolved into an in-dash Navigation system with Pandora, HD Radio, USB ports (2), CD Player, Bluetooth, SD slot, and of course, a backup camera! I installed it myself because I wanted it done right. Only took a day and a half and five calls to Crutchfield Technical Support. Fortunately, I had worked for an auto upholstery shop and knew how to take apart auto interiors. But that's a whole 'nother story.

We don't announce to our kids what our plans are 'cause we always get criticized. Scott was adamant that I didn't need a bed liner in the F-150 until it got rusty. After we had a Line-X bed liner installed, custom colored to match the truck, he thought it looked pretty good. He didn't say that but then he's a Fowler.

With the Nav unit, Mark's position was, "When you're working you only drive nine miles. And right now, you're unemployed so why do you need a Navigation system in the F-150? Since there's no room in the cab for luggage you won't be traveling in it." What's with these people who think you have to have a reason or justification for doing something? If we worried about that we wouldn't be driving Porsches.

The real reason for the trip is to help Brad for a couple of days. Megan flew to New York to visit her two brothers, one of whom is celebrating a birthday. In addition to all the farm work, Brad is working at a mushroom production facility growing Shiitake mushrooms, mainly for the Atlanta market. In addition, he's started working on a Masters Degree in MIS. Speaking of Megan's brothers, if you watch Moonshiners on TV, the originator and cinematographer is Megan's brother Alexis Boling. He has multiple video cameras, each costing a hundred grand. I'm jealous.

We're always happy to travel to Sparta to help out. Mainly 'cause we get to spend time with our granddaughter Emolyn. Somebody asked where she got the dimple in her chin. This is her great-great-grandmother on my dad's side. Her name was Minnie Lee and that's where I got my name. Brad and I also have dimpled chins but they haven't seen the light of day in oh so many years.



Minnie Lee

Emolyn

One of the great things about farm life is the fresh eggs. Gathering the eggs is one of the chores I get to do and usually can get thirty to forty every day. In one case I happened to be standing near one of the roosts when a hen stood up and dropped her egg. I was able to grab it before she sat back down. Now that's a fresh egg! Guess we'll have a car full to take back to Huntsville. Interesting thing is the various sizes and colors. The brown hens lay brown eggs, the speckled hens lay blue eggs, and the black hens lay black eggs.



So, Friday morning I go out and start some of the farm chores. There's always something to repair or replace. While I'm doing, this Suzanne is inside playing with Emolyn. On Saturday, while others were enjoying their HOD tour I was out helping Brad move the pigs to a new area on the farm. Suzanne is inside playing with Emolyn. They keep the boar and sows apart for obvious reasons. Brad wants to determine the timing for them mating and not Theo's hormonal urgings. He's

named after Thelonius Monk, the great Jazz musician. Makes sense since Brad majored in Jazz Studies at Alabama.

This photo shows Theo doing what he enjoys most, other than being with the sows, and that's eating. He tips the scales at about 500 pounds. He's pretty gentle but I keep an eye on him when I'm in his domain.



Thelonius Monk (Theo)

The sows are Sylvia and Gertie. Sylvia was named for Sylvia Plath, an American poet. Gertie got her name from Gertrude Stein, an American writer and poet.

Nothing but highbrow pigs at this farm!



Sylvia, Gertie and future pork chops

The remaining four pigs are still young and are being fattened for pork chops and sausage. They don't have names. I mean, how would you like to have guests for dinner and serve pork chops. The dinner conversation might sound something like this. Our guest would say, "Suzanne, this is absolutely the best pork I have ever tasted!" And I pipe up with, "Those are from a Tamworth pig and her name was "Valerie." Enjoy! Best that the pigs destined for the slaughterhouse remain unnamed. Brad and Megan recently sold ten pigs from the first litter to another farm. They need to reach about 280 pounds before they're taken to the processor.

One of these four (three in the picture) is going to be ours so we've got to figure out how to store about 200 pounds of pork.

Processing usually yields 60-70 percent of the pig's weight. Since the pigs are free range, except for the electric fences, they need to forage to supplement their food supply. Pigs can turn a lush green area into a mud pit very quickly. They eat the vegetation and root for grubs and nuts so they have to be moved to new areas on a regular basis. This is always a challenge since pigs can't be herded. You have to convince them to move, usually with grain but that doesn't always work. Anyway, it took us two days to accomplish the move. It was interesting to observe them. Even though we took down the fence they still would not cross the boundary. Bribing them with grain is iffy. The sows refuse to share with the piglets and will chase them away from the food. There is no maternal instinct in female pigs.

Brad and Megan have close to fifty acres to work with minus the buildings and two ponds, so there is plenty of land for the pigs to forage. Besides, the cleared areas re-grow pretty fast. In addition to the ground looking like it's been turned with a plow, there is plenty of pig fertilizer scattered throughout. That's one advantage to having the pigs clear an area.

Brad and Megan named the place Three Centuries Farm because it has been a working farm in three different centuries, which means you never know what you'll find. The original farm had its own sawmill and gristmill. In fact, the gristmill building is still standing with the grindstone and pulley equipment inside. The problem is the only thing holding the building up is the Wisteria.

But back to finding stuff! After we moved the pigs this time, I found rusty equipment that had been hidden by the overgrowth. Unfortunately, I can't identify what the equipment is.



This next one was mounted on a post about four feet off the ground. The post is broken off where the bolt held the equipment. I'm coming back after the pigs have cleared this area to check this piece out.



Those are just a small sampling of rusty hardware scattered around the farm, much of it yet to be found.

There are some really interesting structures that they're still using, including the smokehouse, larder, springhouse, and tack barn. There are also five barns, a carriage house, and a general store.







The General Store (4th row, on left) is where Megan has her Letterpress printer. It also has much of the original furnishing including a post office room, soda bottles, and a rusted-out gas pump.

Monday's farm routine is no different than any other day. The animals have to be tended to seven days a week. I let the chickens out and fed them. Brad fed the pigs and donkeys; Suzanne played with Emolyn. The goats, mules, dogs, and cats get taken care of later. I spent most of the day building a new egg-washing system. Megan's mother, Gaelle, is in France for a couple of weeks visiting family. She comes to the farm from Atlanta most weekends and likes to wash the eggs. Her father was, among other things, an egg farmer in France so it must be in the genes. Anyway, she will have to be trained on the new system.

I need some stuff from the hardware store, so I decide on an early morning trip into Sparta, some 15 miles from the farm. As a precaution to keep from making multiple trips, I ask if there is anything we need from the grocery store. Sparta has an independent grocery store and not much else. You enter town from the south, turn right at the first of only two traffic lights and there it is. Suzanne stayed at the farm and played with Emolyn.

Brad works in an old furniture manufacturing facility turned into a mushroom farm. He was installing a new electric motor in their rather large mixer, which is used to create the growth medium for the mushrooms. They have a clean room that I couldn't go into. I couldn't go in there since I was wearing my farm shoes. They inoculate the medium with the fungus and any contamination will destroy the entire block of medium. A stray fungus or bacteria will overpower the Shiitake spawn. The inoculated medium is placed in individual plastic bags where they sit in a temperature-controlled room.

After a couple of weeks, the blocks of medium are removed from the bags and placed on racks in another room that is both temperature and humidity controlled. After ten weeks the mushrooms are harvested, weighed, and packaged. The blocks

of medium can continue to yield more mushroom growth but not of the same quality. They sell the blocks to individuals as “Grow Your Own Blocks” with instructions on how to grow about two crops. All that to add a toadstool to food! Yuk!

The picture on the left is Shiitake mushrooms. They also grow Lions Main mushrooms which are shown on the right. They’re all gross.



The mushroom business is a two-man operation so in addition to processing the mushrooms, Brad takes care of most of the electrical and mechanical installation and maintenance.

Later, Suzanne, Emolyn, and I are having lunch and Suzanne asks what I think about her making a pound cake. I know we don’t have the ingredients so I tell her it’s a dumb idea. Pound cakes have a history in our family. My mother-in-law made the best pound cake imaginable. We would make the twelve-hour trip from Alexandria, VA to Atlanta and just as we pulled in the driveway, she would pull one out of the oven just so I could eat it warm. To this day I don’t know how she did that. That pound cake is one of the factors that got me to propose to Suzanne.

But no way am I going to Sparta...again! That’s thirty minutes round trip and we don’t need a pound cake that bad. So much for my vote. The people at the grocery store remembered me from the first trip and as I’m checking out, all I could think of was that Suzanne was at the farm playing with Emolyn. I get as far as the aforementioned traffic signal, which is within walking distance from the store when the phone rings. It’s Suzanne and she says, “I forgot to put Sour Cream on the list. We’ve got a little bit and that might be enough so just come on home.” I ain’t that stupid! I turn around and go back into the store. This time they’re really chuckling. “You came back just to get some Sour Cream?”

I’ll have to admit it. She made the best pound cake I’ve tasted in years. Since she’s always used her mother’s recipe; the only thing we can figure is the fresh

eggs. We've been told before that fresh eggs make a noticeable difference. It's definitely true! Brad tells me that store-bought eggs are usually thirty days from when the hens produced them. He also said that the whites of fresh eggs are thicker than those bought from a grocery store. I think I'll crack one of each to see if that's true.

Going off on a tangent, we have a multi-national family. Megan is one-half French and speaks the language fluently. Melissa (Mark's wife) is one-half Mexican and speaks no Spanish whatsoever. And Holly (Scott's wife) is Polish/Slovakian and does a pretty darn good job of speaking. So, all of our grandchildren are diversified.

Megan returned from New York in the afternoon, which means that Emolyn is not going to pay any attention to her grandparents for the remainder of the visit. Oh well! Brad is still recovering from two surgeries in January. The first was a simple appendectomy. The second was more severe with a double re-section of his colon to fix a kink caused by the first surgery. But even with all his work and Megan running her own business, they find time to have a good family life. I was able to catch Brad with my iPhone camera just as he got home from work. This is Megan just back from her trip to New York. Pretty little filly ain't she?



And talented too! Megan has a degree from the University of Georgia but is smart enough to root for the University of Alabama. As owner/operator of Brown Parcel Press, she creates some amazing print graphics. I enjoy watching her operate the letterpress printer. It's mechanical and makes lots of noises. Sorta like working on a 912.



Tuesday, we head back to Huntsville with 17 dozen farm fresh eggs. But we can't leave before the chores are done. Brad has to get to work, so Megan and I take the trek down to the pigs with buckets of feed. We have to fill their water troughs again. Pigs consume a lot of water. Then we take care of the chickens and goats. While we're doing this Suzanne is...well, you know what she's doing. We'll stop off in Conyers to treat Suzanne's sister-in-law to lunch for her birthday celebration. We didn't make it to the HOD tour but we had a great long weekend anyway. Saturday you can find me at the corner of University and Jordan selling eggs.

Follow-Up to that Trip Report

Jim Cambron, our Heart 'O Dixie past president and current PCA Zone Representative sends out a weekly mailing with the latest region news. He usually distributes any trip reports when I write about some of our events. Recently, I sent a few people a personal, non-HOD trip report. Jim distributed it to his humongous mailing list this week. He had the audacity to question my integrity when I wrote

about a black chicken laying a black egg. Can you imagine that? Here is what he wrote in his e-mail.

*“Attached is **another great southern-charm story by our supreme curmudgeon Lee Fowler**. Be sure and pay attention to the first part of the story, or you may miss the reference to Porsches, and I have it on good authority that none of the four-legged tan animals actually come from Lee’s family tree; but if you add a white beard, doesn’t that guy on the bottom of page 3 look familiar? Oink! Oink! If you believe the black egg story, I also have a ’73 911 SC for sale at a good price too!”*

First of all, Supreme Curmudgeon should have been capitalized! I hate to criticize Jim since we have something in common besides a love of Porsches. You see, he and I were born in the same hospital in Mobile, Alabama. Albeit in different decades! And another thing! I simply can’t believe that Jim has a Porsche that old. He’s a late model hot-rodder!

But getting back to the egg story. I only got responses to my initial mailing from Karen Trevey, Steve Baum, and Jim. Jim is the only one who questioned or doubted the accuracy of my story. I don’t understand his questioning the fact that chickens can lay different-colored eggs.

I fully expected more response to that part of our farm trip report. Suzanne laid out several scenarios that could possibly explain the lack of a reaction. She said that maybe everybody read the first paragraphs and when they found out the report was just about us and our trip to the farm, they quit reading. I refused to believe that explanation. Why would anybody not want to continue reading?

Then she said that since I’m the one who wrote the story, people naturally assumed that what I write is the gospel truth and should be accepted as fact. Now that is really a silly assumption. I don’t know anybody gullible enough to buy that.

For whatever reason that I got only one response to the “black egg” story, I don’t want anybody telling their friends and family about black chickens laying black eggs. “Well, Lee Fowler said it’s so!” Just think what that would do to my integrity! I don’t want my sterling reputation stained because nobody questioned my absolutely insane tale about black chicken eggs. But Karen Trevey fell for it.

So, here's the real story. The speckled chicken lays brownish eggs just like the brown chickens. Most of the eggs range from white to different shades of brown. I put in a picture of a speckled hen for the blue egg because it made a better story. The blue eggs are laid by Americanas. Here's a picture of one.



Honest truth. They have a gene that makes their eggshells blue. Now the black egg is a different story altogether. The chicken really is black. But the egg started out looking like this.



This is a can of black spray paint.



So, using common mathematical notations we come up with this.



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Brad and Megan no longer raise pigs or grow mushrooms but still have a few chickens for fresh eggs. Plus a few goats, miniature donkeys, cats, a Great Pyrenees, and another daughter named Gillian. Brad now teaches MIS at Georgia College and State University.

And that's the rest of the story!